Fitrah Outlook

Beyond the Renaissance Philosophy of Man to Account for Moral Motivation

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Dedication

To my family thanks for all your love and support over the years and my mentor Dr. Mona Abul Fadl, may God bless her soul.

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the Lord of all the Worlds, and the source of all Wisdom and Knowledge. It is His pleasure that I seek above all else.

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Chapter I: Introduction

In a survey of prominent ethical theories, Henry Veatch finds a well-defined division "between so-called 'teleologists' (or perhaps Utilitarians) on the one hand, and so-called 'deontologists' (or perhaps Kantians) on the other."[1] Accordingly, moral motivation and justification tend to be based on either general utilitarian grounds, i.e. pleasure and the greater happiness of the greater number,[2] or on deontological grounds, i.e. morality is regarded simply as "a categorical duty, incumbent upon everyone and recognizable simply by man's practical reason,"[3] or merely because "one ought to". Despite the apparent differences between the "desire-ethic" and the "duty-ethic", Veatch argues that the two types of ethics are alike. They "represent attempts to found an ethics without having to make appeals to any intrinsic 'goods' or 'bads' in reality, or to any 'rights' or 'wrongs', 'oughts' or 'ought nots', as these might by supposed to exist in the real world, or *in rerum natura.*"[4] John Rawls in his appeal to a social contract, attempts a rescue mission, with the justification of morality based on an original position in which one is "behind the veil of ignorance." On Rawls's view, "one has no natural duty or obligation to the two principles of justice [equal liberty and equal opportunity]; but one does have a

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[1] Henry Veatch, *Human Rights: Facts or Fancy?* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), 11.

[2] Ibid., 72.

[3] Ibid., 12.

[4] Ibid., 13.

moral obligation, in virtue of one's hypothetical, and yet nonetheless, effectual agreement, as it were, from behind 'the veil of ignorance' to honor these principles of justice."[5]

All the above schools of thought fail to provide an adequate basis or foundation for moral justification and motivation, despite the tremendous increase in variety of these classes of ethical theories. As Alasdair Macintyre has bluntly concluded, at this juncture of the moral cross roads, "there is no other option but to close up shop and counsel its adherents among present-day moral, legal, and political philosophers that they might as well be reconciled in the future to going either the way Aristotle or of Nietzsche."[6] Macintyre decries this epistemological chaos at the end of chapter nine of his book, *After Virtue*: "it is no wonder that the teaching of ethics is so often destructive and skeptical in its effects upon the minds of those taught. But *which* [theory] ought we to choose? And *how* ought we to choose?"[7]

Listening to Macintyre's call for a moral savior, John Hare brings God back into morality. In his recent book, *God and Morality: A Philosophical History*, he argues that "theology or thinking about God has played a role in ethical theory within western philosophy."[8] However, it is "the successor of the original version who abandons the role given to theological premises… [that] got the field of ethics into difficulties."[9] His

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[5] Quoted in Veatch, 9.

[6] Alasdair Macintyre, *After Virtue: Ascending in Moral Theory* (London: Duckworth Ltd., 1981), 111.

[7] Ibid., 112.

[8] John Hare, *God and Morality: A Philosophical History* (MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2007), 1.

[9] Ibid., 3.

conclusion is that: "anyone who wants to carry on doing one of these types of theory without God will have to point to a… variant that succeeds in finding a substitute for the work that God did in the original version."[10]

Hare's discovery of the cause of the "hang-over" of civilization from atheism, secularism, and the bankruptcy of the moral field, does not answer or address the roots of moral motivational crisis, however, because he invokes a "divine command theory" in which God could theoretically reverse all "laws of morality", making them arbitrary.[11] This view does not adequately answer the moral quest for *which* ethical theory we ought to choose, let alone *how* and *why* ought we to choose. The moral agent knows about the complete desacralization of nature, i.e. the removal of God from nature and the replacement of religion with humanism. He suffers from the pain of the "death of God" theology which brought with it darkness and a void to the human mind and soul. Thus, the result is a sense of loss of life's meaning, a lost of direction and moral motivation for the human being.

In addition to Veatch's classification, Macintyre's cry for help, and Hare's rescue attempt, there is a lacuna in the literature (relatively speaking) on Islamic philosophical ethics. Such a gap leaves a student of ethics wondering if there *is* such a thing as Islamic ethics. Majid Fakhry's book, *Ethical Theories in Islam*, attributes the problem to two main causes, namely "the legalism and ritualism of the religious and institutional life of

[10] Ibid.

[11] Hare invokes the classic example of the divine command for Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac.

Muslim individuals or groups, as well as the comparatively scant contribution of Muslim authors to ethical and political discussions…"[12]

The missing element from conventional secular approaches to morality is the *Fitrah* outlook with *Fitrah* as its nodal nexus. It is derived from the root FTR which has multiple meanings. Linguistically, the verb means to "create", "make", "originate", or "to bring into being".[13] It is used in the Qur'an in this sense as follows:

> So set your purpose for religion, as a *hanīf* — a nature given (*fitrata*) by God, upon which He originated (*fatara*) mankind. There is no changing God's creation. That is the upright religion, but most people do not know.[14]
>
> فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا ۚ فِطْرَتَ ٱللَّهِ ٱلَّتِى فَطَرَ ٱلنَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا ۚ لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ ٱللَّهِ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ ٱلدِّينُ ٱلْقَيِّمُ وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ ٱلنَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

The Prophet of Islam also said[15], "Every new-born child is born in a state of *Fitrah*. Then his parents make him a Jew, a Christian or a Magian, just as an animal is born intact. Do you observe any among them that are maimed (at birth)?"[16] Given the rich field of meanings of the root FTR, *Fitrah* is also by turns a "capacity", a "disposition", a "source of guidance", the "seat of consciousness", an "inward stance", a "source of sense

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[12] Majid Fakhry, *Ethical Theories in Islam* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), xi.

[13] Rohi Baalbaki, *Al-Mawrid: A Modern Arabic-English Dictionary* (Lebanon: Dar El-Elm Lilmalayin, 2004), 829

[14] All Qur'anic verses are translated from Royal Aal al-Bayt, "Translations," Institute for Islamic Thought, available online @ http://altafsir.com/ViewTranslations, (accessed June 3, 2009), Holy Qur'an 30:30. The same *surah* also reveals "God's original creation (*fitrah*), upon which He (patterned) humanity" (30:24).

[15] I. M. Ḥanîf, *Saḥîh Muslim bisharh al-Nawawî*, Book of Qadr, Vol. 16 (al-Matba'at al-Misriyyah bi al-Azhari, 1930) 207.

[16] For further analysis of the term, see: University of Essex Islamic Society, "*Maintaining the Characteristics of Fitrah,*" http://islamworld.net/docs/fitrah.html, (accessed June 3, 2009).

of responsibility", and a "reaction to being moral".[17] In this thesis, *Fitrah* therefore signifies the natural constitution with which a child is created in his mother's womb, including the faculty of knowing God, with which He endowed humankind, and whereby a person has the inherent capacity or innate disposition to accept the ultimate truth.[18] Given this field of meanings, Shaykh Ali Goma'a, the Grand of Mufti of Egypt, translates the aforementioned verse as follows:

> So set thy face firmly towards religion in an upright state (*hanīf*). That intrinsic faculty by which man knows God directly (*fitrata*, which could also be translated as that inherent capacity to accept the Truth). There is no changing God's creation (*fatara*). That is the eternal religion, the lasting religion, the right religion. But most people do not know.[19]

One can therefore understand this verse in a variety of complementary ways. This spiritual dimension of moral epistemology will help to see that morality is intrinsic to the human state, and that the moral agent can respond to universal moral laws, since one is equipped with the necessary instrument of moral perception and discernment according to the Qur'an.

From this point of view, philosophical ethics in today's oscillating culture has no reference outside itself. In both humanistic and naturalistic accounts of moral knowledge, 'relativism' is the logical conclusion; there is no center or anchor by which the moral agent may exercise his morality. As Fyodor Dostoevsky proclaims in *Brothers Karamazov*, "If there is no God, anything is permissible."[20] This accounts for the

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[17] Abdulaziz Sachedina, *Human Rights and the Conflict of Culture* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 59.

[18] Abdulaziz Sachedina, *Human Rights and the Conflict of Cultures* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 88.

[19] Quoted from a text sent to the Dalai Lama at "A Gathering of Hearts" conference in San Francisco in 2006.

[20] Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov: Classic Collection* (Ashland: Blackstone Audiobooks, Inc., 2008) 19.

morality's intrinsic "dynamism" which tends towards morbidity. It is a virtual energy caused by the self-referential nature of secular ethics and the absolute autonomy of such a moral outlook.

Such accounts provide important partial truths that are significant in an Islamic approach to philosophical ethics, but they are only partial accounts with contradictory ideas and assumptions that do not encompass the total truth. Therefore, to have an integrated and holistic perspective on life, a moral paradigm must have the vertical axis of knowledge that relates man to God in this world and in the world beyond. Only then will a human being know where he comes from and where he will go and most importantly, "why be moral". Only then will the moral agent be able to answer the question posed by Nietzsche, "Why be good? Why not be evil?"

The roots of this crisis lie in deep epistemological confusion from the Islamic point of view. It is imperative to deconstruct and reconstruct a moral outlook with a new twist on epistemology. The first step in this process is a radical reevaluation of the sources of knowledge of man, nature, and the Divine. The next step is to question the purpose of moral knowledge. Is morality just a matter of invention or discovery?

The epistemological paradigm that can solve this problem is the *Fitrah* outlook, with *Fitrah* as its nodal nexus. It is not merely philosophical or empirical reasoning. It is based on a divine attribute, closing the gap between appearance and reality. "Then He [God] proportioned him, and breathed into him of His spirit. And He made for you hearing, and sight and hearts. Little thanks do you give."[21] It asserts that truth is infinite and different methods are necessary to reach the different aspect of it. The *Fitrah*

[21] Holy Qur'an 32:9, see 15:29 and 38:72 for further reference.

outlook, by its nature, is a comprehensive moral world view. It refers to the epistemological structures, frameworks, specific methodologies, and analytical tools to understand as well as to explain and interpret the world, both seen and unseen. This Islamic moral paradigm, with *Fitrah* as its fulcrum, may be seen as a coterminous, open, and extended one. Its emphasis on the unity of truth and affirms the plurality and hierarchy of moral methodologies and their application to moral motivation and moral justification.

Surely, filling the lacuna in the literature on Islamic philosophical ethics cannot be carried out by one person, nor can be solved in one thesis. The attempt here is to offer a small contribution toward such a task, with the hope of igniting the interest of other students of the field to probe further the area of moral motivation within the Islamic tradition.

In the first chapter, I examine the weaknesses of duty and desire ethics, highlighting the internal inconsistencies of each. In the following chapter, I introduce the *Fitrah* outlook as a holistic approach to moral motivation and justification requiring more than rational, sensual, or social dimensions of morality. The next chapter examines the Qur'anic epistemology which is the foundation of the *Fitrah* outlook and Islamic sciences of man and nature, for "We have neglected nothing in the Book."[22]

مَّا فَرَّطۡنَا فِى ٱلۡكِتَـٰبِ مِن شَىۡءٍ

The thesis concludes with an examination of the universality of the *Fitrah* outlook in the context of *A Common Word* based on love of God and love of neighbor. "Say: 'My

[22] Holy Qur'an 6:38

prayer and my rituals, and my living, and my dying, are all for God, the Lord of the Worlds."[23]

قُلۡ إِنَّ صَلَاتِي وَنُسُكِي وَمَحۡيَايَ وَمَمَاتِي لِلَّهِ رَبِّ ٱلۡعَٰلَمِينَ

[23] Holy Qur'an 6:162

Chapter II: The *Fitrah* Outlook: The Whole Picture

My concern in this chapter is to argue the need for a moral motivation theory that entails a holistic approach to human nature. Conventional theories of morality exclude a spiritual dimension, focusing on a secular approach to the study of the nature of the good life and the right or wrong of particular moral issues. Some theorists judge actions in terms of their motives, or the character and nature of the act itself, while others judge them in terms of their consequences. This dichotomy about the nature and the basis of good and evil or right and wrong fails to provide an adequate and systematic exposition of moral motivation and justification from an Islamic point of view. I will argue that Kant's formalism, Bentham's pleasure principle, and Rawls' justice as fairness theory attempting to find a middle ground between these two "desire" and "duty" ethics, are all rightfully part of the moral story, but not the whole story. I have chosen to focus on the three figures of Immanuel Kant, Jeremy Bentham, and John Rawls, because each gives one dimension of moral motivation and justification. My argument will consist of two stages. First, I shall present a brief description of the three moral theories. Secondly, I will show the inadequacy of each of these theories in terms of moral motivation and justification.

Let us begin by looking at Immanuel Kant's moral theory. The role of reason according to Kant is not to achieve happiness, which he asserts "is an illusion".[24] The sole function of reason is the development and cultivation of the good will, not the good

[24] Kant Immanuel, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans., James W. Ellington (Indiana: Hackett Publishing Co., Inc., 1993) 8.

life, which is a "side-effect" of the good will.[25] "It is the intention to act rightly." He sees human dignity and moral worth as wholly bound up with being able to act for moral reason. Since people have control over the motives of their actions, but not their consequences, it is not the consequences that give an act its moral worth, but rather the motives or intentions. But it is not just any motive, for it is the one that is done "with respect to duty" regardless of the consequences. "It is to perform the right act with a sense of duty, not inclination… The act will have moral worth when it is done from duty and not just out of duty."[26] Kant asserts the universality of reason's prescription to us, believing that persons are "autonomous" and free agents. They should only act in a way that they cannot reject if the act is universalized.

Kant illustrates the difference between inclination and duty with the example of a shopkeeper who charges a fair and uniform price to all his customers. The shopkeeper may do this either to profitably maintain a good business practice, or out of sympathy for his clients, or because he believes it is the right thing to do. On Kant's view, only when the shopkeeper adopts the last option out of concern for morality does the act have moral worth. According to Kant's moral test, "Act only on that maxim whereby you can, at the same time, will that it should become a universal law."[27] This is Kant's "categorical

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[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid, 11.

[27] The moral test is outlined as follows:

1. Identify the act.
2. Identify the motive of the act.
3. Convert the maxim into a universal law.
4. Imagine a world in which step "3" is applied as a law of nature.

imperative" at the root of all other moral requirements. The shopkeeper therefore ought to charge a fair and uniform price. Consequently, the nature of moral obligation is the command of reason to act "out of duty", "according to duty", or "as duty requires,"[28]and not from apprehension of beneficial or injurious results.

Accordingly, the simple answer that Kant gives for why be moral is that rationality requires it.[29] He argues that the good will "always holds first place estimating the total worth of our actions and constitutes the condition of all the rest."[30] In fact, a good will is the "only thing that is good without qualification."[31] This means that all the gifts of nature such as intelligence, wit, judgment, as well as gifts of fortune such as power, riches, honor, health, and so forth could be morally good if used rightly, which requires effort and energy, and could also be used wrongly. There is always a qualification. The only morally good thing without qualification is the good will. All other gifts may become "extremely bad", "mischievous", or "dangerous" and "abominable".[32]

The moral motivation in Kant's view is "real and strictly binding." If there is an obligation, then a rational autonomous person simply ought to do it. The power of this framework according to Kant lies in the general principle of the categorical imperative,

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5. Kant wants the agent to ask himself: is it possible to successfully do an act in step "1" in the world of "4". If the answer is yes, then it is done out of duty, and therefore it is an act that is moral or right. If the answer is no, then the act is wrong and not logically consistent.

[28] Ibid., 10.

[29] Ibid., 8.

[30] Ibid., 9.

[31] Ibid., 8.

[32] Ibid., 34.

the fundamental law of morality. Accordingly, all moral duties are categorically (that is, unconditionally) imperative.[33]

Kant therefore never challenges our common sense morality, but rather offers a justification for our intuition.[34] By providing the moral agent with a test, Kant's moral philosophy introduces a key pillar for judging moral action. It is the tool to help a person think through a judgment when faced with a moral choice, e.g. whether or not to lie, cheat, steal, break a promise, or even take one's own life when feeling hopeless, helpless and worthless, etc... .

It is clear from the above account that Kant's moral principle is very straight forward, offering a consistent and systematic way to check whether or not a person is really acting for the sake of doing what is right. There is no internal contradiction, ambiguity, or absurdity. However, it is only one side of the moral story.

First of all, let us consider the nature of moral obligation. According to Kant, if there is an obligation, then as rational, autonomous persons, we "ought" to do it out of duty with respect to the law. But would a rational, free person really abide by this? A quick examination of human history will reveal very few followers on this basis alone.

Second of all, Kant believed that reason and reason alone can produce a will that is good in itself.[35] But are there not any "real and strictly binding" desires that complement reason as "a practical faculty"? Why should one necessarily consider them unreal? As Veatch asks concerning the role of desire for deontologists:

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[33] Jonathan Jacobs, *"Dimensions of Moral Theory"* (MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 156.

[34] Kant's concept of the good will is one side of the concept of *Fitrah* as we will see.

[35] Immanuel Kant, *The Foundation of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans., Mary Gregor, (Cambridge: University Press, 1991), 9.

> … in their eagerness to press home their point that mere human desires and purposes can never provide a sufficient ground for moral duties and obligations, the overzealous deontologists suddenly find themselves in the embarrassing position… that any and all moral judgments – judgments as to good and evil, right and wrong, what ought to be and ought not to be, and so on – would seem never to be self-evident. Instead, the question "Why?" is always relevant with respect to them: "Why ought I to love my neighbor?"; "Why is it wrong for me to deprive a fellow citizen of life, liberty, or property?" Moreover, what proves to be especially embarrassing about these ever-relevant "why-questions" with respect to moral judgments – at least embarrassing to the deontologists – is that there would seem to be no way of answering such questions save by appealing to human ends, purposes, or desires.[36]

From this point of view, inclination is a necessary, although insufficient, condition for the moral life. Good will and inclination are even two sides of the same coin. The integration between these elements resolves the tension between getting what a person wants and sticking to moral duty. There is no more tug-of-war between acting to satisfy one's own interest and doing the right thing, which we shall return to in the next chapter.

Now let us look at utilitarianism. To begin with, one must admit that utilitarianism as a moral theory has remained very popular and vibrant to this day. I will first address the inadequacy of its theory of value and moral motivation as espoused by its founding father, Jeremy Bentham. He maintained that:

> Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do. On one hand the standard of right and wrong, on the other chain of cause and effects, are fastened to their throne. They govern us in all we do, in all we say, in all we think: every effort we can make to throw off our subjection will serve but to demonstrate and confirm it.[37]

Which action should be chosen and carried out? He asserts that the only good when judging an action is not the character or nature of the act itself, but rather its consequences, i.e. the "pleasure-pain calculus". This is the "external standard", "the fundamental axiom", "the measure of right and wrong", and the first principle which is

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[36] Veatch, *Human Rights: Fact or Fancy?*, 20.

[37] Jeremy Bentham, *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, ed. Alan Ryan (London: Penguin Books, 1987) 1.

used to establish everything else. Bentham argues that it "neither requires nor admits of any other regulator than itself."[38] The principle of utility is thus the only available standard without qualification. It is not "moral sense", "common sense", "rule of right", "law of nature", "truth", "love", or "knowledge". Bentham asserts that all of these are the "carnage" of moral philosophy. Furthermore, Bentham identifies seven characteristics by which the moral agent can measure pleasure and pain.[39] According to his "Felicific calculus", a person can actually calculate whether an act is right or wrong empirically.[40]

Unlike Kant's abstract definition of right as independent of the good, Bentham offers us a highly practical and tangible account of morality, intuitively defining the right *in terms of* the good. It is a seemingly attractive approach in the sense that nobody apparently wants to produce more evil and less good for oneself. Pleasure and pain are obvious facts, and many people live in a continuous balancing act between the two, trying to produce the most utility and suffer the least pain.

But does it not matter what or where the source of pleasure is? Is Bentham's judgment a valid one? What reasons or proof can he give for such an argument? We are told that, "The notion of utility as a 'principle' is not itself subject to proof",[41] and that "questions of ultimate ends do not admit of proof".[42] But how does Bentham then exempt his own assertion from this claim? Mr. Bentham is telling us to take it at face value, to be

[38] Ibid., 33.

[39] For full explanation of the seven characteristics, see ibid. page 30.

[40] Bentham's Four Step Moral Test: "The Test and Measure of All Virtue." Ibid., 31-32.

[41] Bentham, *IPML*, 13.

[42] John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism,* ed. George Sher (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001), 8.

happy just to swim in the ocean of sensual pleasure.[43] If we want more, we can just dive down into the deep ocean for more. Is that all there is for a normative theory of ethics?

The first objection to Bentham's claim comes from a very devout disciple, John Stuart Mill in the form of a cry for help to save act utilitarianism. During his "search and rescue operation," J.S. Mill argues that act utilitarianism is not necessarily "a doctrine worthy only of swine," since human capacities differ from those of pigs. There is another more productive pleasure, i.e. intellectual pleasure. Mill's argument is that not all pleasures are "created equal". Contrary to Bentham's purely quantitative approach that "push-pin is as good as poetry", Mill asserts that the quality of pleasure should count as well as the quantity.[44] He further attests that intellectual pleasure is more valuable than the sensual and must be a factor in the calculation of the greatest amount of happiness. Mill therefore offers us an account which gives a distinction between the experience of pleasure itself and the source of such pleasure. And who does the comparison in this informed preference test between the intellectual insight and the physical comfort? Mill's answer is a panel of qualified judges who have experienced both forms of pleasures. The panel informs us "which of two modes of existence is the most grateful to the feelings".[45] All we have to do is to measure, count, and conform.

But what if Bentham still prefers the sensual over the intellectual? To simply declare that the latter is "more pleasurable" is of no help at all. To have a panel of competent

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[43] To borrow Robert Nozick's notion of the all pleasure tank and extend it. For full definition of "the experience machine," see Robert Norzick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 42.

[44] Mill, *Utilitarianism,* 11.

[45] Ibid., 12.

judges who have experienced both pleasures[46] telling us which one is best, is begging the question. Therefore, Mill's rescue attempt still ultimately fails to give us any standard or criterion to discriminate between different types of pleasure.

In fact, both Bentham and Mill offer a "mental state" account of welfare that does not distinguish between "the mental states involved in believing something that really is true and a successful deception".[47] As James Griffin argues, "both Bentham and Mill saw utility as having to enter our experience. But we desire things other than states of mind; I might sometimes prefer, say, bitter truth to comforting delusion".[48] Griffin uses the example that "if a father wants his children to be happy, what he wants, what is valuable to him, is a state of the world, not a state of his mind; merely to delude him into thinking that his children flourish, therefore, does not give him what he values."[49] Therefore, the mental state account subordinates truth to utility, since it admits happiness that is false. This clearly contradicts religious teachings that "there is no right superior to that of truth", and is based on a confusion regarding the nature of the operation of the intelligence, as we shall see in the Qur'anic methodology chapter.

Furthermore, both Bentham and Mill fail to provide any justification for why we should include others in the "Felicific calculus". And even if we do, why should we count others like ourselves? As Veatch points out:

> Utilitarians are convinced that…by mere logical or linguistic considerations alone, one can be brought to admit that one is under obligation (moral obligation) to respect, and to help bring about, the happiness or well-being of others no less than his own. And yet clearly this

[46] As Mill suggests in *Utilitarianism*, 8.

[47] James Griffin, *Well-Being* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 13.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid.

> will never do. One cannot by a linguistic legerdemain with the Principle of Universalizability manage to convert a purely egoistic concern with one's own happiness and advantage into a purportedly altruistic concern with the greatest happiness of the greatest number.[50]

A statistical balance of facts cannot yield such moral obligation or motivation. Just knowing and experiencing some biological or psychological facts cannot provide a solid, defensible foundation for moral judgment.[51]

Moreover, Mill's account suffers from a problem that Bentham's does not in that he has to integrate various pleasures. Even if we admit for the sake of argument that the principle of utility is a measure of happiness, it is only one criterion to measure one thing, analogous to a ruler that measures length, but not weight (or even the opposite of length). Consequently, the notion of "greatest net sum of the goods",[52] can never be implemented if goods are incommensurable, i.e. the agent cannot find a common denominator which enables him to calculate overall utility.[53] It is like asking a mathematician to find out the average or the total of many dimensions of quantity, i.e. length, area, and volume. In the same way, friendship, love, beauty, knowledge, and life all are distinct and unique dimensions of our humanness and well being, dimensions of human good that cannot be "summed up" to yield an overall utility.[54] As John Finnis argues,

> In short, no determinate meaning can be found for the term "good" that would allow any commensurating and calculus of good to be made in order to settle those basic questions of practical reason which we call "moral" questions. … [Hence] the consequentialist methodological injunction to maximize net good is senseless, in the way that it is senseless

[50] Veatch, *Human Rights: Fact or Fancy?*, 32.

[51] Montague Brown, *The Quest for Moral Foundations* (Washington D.C.:Georgetown University, 1996), 66.

[52] G.E. Moore holds other goods as friendship and beauty are intrinsically good. See: The Metaphysics of G.E. Moore (Philosophical Studies Series), by David O'Connor.

[53] Brown, *The Quest for Moral Foundations*, 117.

[54] Ibid.

> to try to sum up the quantity of the size of this page, the quantity of the number six, and the quantity of the mass of this book.[55]

To partially correct the aforementioned problems with the mental state account of welfare, some utilitarians have introduced the notion of "satisfaction of desire" in which the object of desire must exist to count towards utility. But this approach is still subjective, since desirability defines goodness rather than goodness defining desirability. What if people's preferences are based upon false beliefs? The satisfaction of desire account of welfare requires that they be fulfilled. As Daniel Hausman argues, "The only consistent ways out of this impasse are either to follow people's preferences, even if they depend upon beliefs that are false and unreasonable, or to employ some substantive theory of welfare".[56] Thus, the satisfaction of desire account does not rule out egoistic or illusory desires, because truth is still subordinate to utility. Similarly, the aforementioned problems of justifying the inclusion others in the "Felicific calculus" and integrating different pleasures apply to this account.

The last moral theory to be considered is the social contract theory, which Montague Brown calls the "political extrapolation of egoism".[57] Here, the key principle is the notion of collective agreement, and the "buzzword" is "rightful authority". When one asks what moral principle one should follow, the answer is "moral authority from mutual agreement", even if this agreement is hypothetical and ideal rather than actually historical. Morality is constructed of laws for the common good, which must be obeyed

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[55] John Finnis as cited in Brown, *The Quest for Moral Foundations,* 117.

[56] Daniel Hausman and Michael McPherson, *Economic Analysis and Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 76.

[57] Brown, *The Quest for Moral Foundations,* 35. The principle of self-interest is the pivotal force for moral motivation and the theory's conclusions.

because it is in everyone's best interest. The driving force of morality is to better one's position in society according to Rawls' theory. Unbiased, clear thinkers, as rationally self-interested and mutually disinterested agents, judge alternative social systems based on a technique for fulfilling self-interest, not based on the fact that others have intrinsic worth.[58] The "ought-tos" and values fit together to give us a framework for general thought which Rawls calls a "model of reflective equilibrium".

The veil of ignorance is a key distinguishing feature of Rawls' "original position", which he asserts is:

> To nullify the effects of specific contingencies which put men at odds and tempt them to exploit social and natural circumstances to their own advantage… they do not know how the various alternatives will affect their own particular case and they are obliged to evaluate principles on the basis of general considerations. It is assumed, then, that the parties do not know certain kinds of particular facts. First of all, no one knows his place in society, his class position, or social status; nor does he know his fortune in the distribution of natural assets and abilities, his intelligence and strength, and the like. Nor, again, does anyone know his conception of the good, the particulars of his rational plane of life, or even the special features of his psychology such as his aversion to risk or liability to optimism or pessimism… [59]

According to this theory (or even an ancient version of it championed by Thrashymachus[60]), moral principles are constructed by a process of "rational reflection". Moral agents reflect on their interests and the differences that alternative policies would make when participating in a cooperative social scheme where such policies are upheld and respected. Behind the "veil of ignorance",[61] the parties see individuals as equal in

[58] John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, ed. Erin Kelly (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 15.

[59] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2005), 136-137.

[60] Plato, *Republic*, trans., B. M. A. Grub (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1974), 31.

[61] Ibid.

"power" but not in moral worth. They might see them as different persons,[62] but not unique. Thus, moral claims are about procedures. The outcome of this procedure for the moral agent is still self-interest. Even though the "veil of ignorance" rids us of the inequality between the parties, such as bargaining power, biases, errors, and poor reasoning, the real motive for the parties is not to be short-changed or to end up with the short end of the stick. He therefore claims that the "veil of ignorance" is employed to invalidate any contractual arrangement occurring in the state of nature. The real motivation for the principle of equal basic liberties is clearly *not* the moral principle that all people deserve the same as oneself.[63] Accordingly, this social contract morality is merely a counsel of prudential self-interest. This is clear from Brown's criticism of Rawls' theory:

> Rawls' attempt to provide a version of social contract ethics which is not based on the arbitrary whims of power is no more successful. To make it work, he has to bring in something like Hume's benevolence and then is stuck with two irreconcilable principles. Although his conclusions, his "principles of justice," are acceptable at least as minimum moral guides, he provides no reason why we should accept these conclusions; his first principles of self-interest and benevolence contradict each other. If we wish to accept his conclusions, we must find other principles to justify them.[64]

Consequently, all the problems with utilitarianism apply to social contract theory. As Brown asserts, "it is really the inevitable result of any theory of morality that chooses the passions for its foundations. Since the passions are in themselves non-rational, the morality built on such foundations will also be, at the bottom, non-rational."[65]

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[62] Rawls' main criticism of consequentialism is the failure to see each member of the society as different persons; the distinction between persons vs. John M. Taurek's arguments: The loss to the person but not the loss of the person. See "*Should the Numbers Count?"* Philosophy and Public Affairs 6(4): 293-316.

[63] Brown, *The Quest for Moral Foundations,* 46.

[64] Ibid., 48.

[65] Ibid., 49.

So, the question remains, why be moral? Why bother being good, or respect the dignity of each human being? Why listen to the universality of reason's prescription to us? Indeed, all three moral theories we have discussed attempt to give an account of how moral considerations are action-guiding, but they all fail. I therefore believe that any materialistic account of moral motivation or justification is like a mirage in a sandy desert in which the moral agent parched with moral thirst mistakes the mirage for water until he reaches it, finding it to be nothing.[66] Each of these moral theories takes a compartmental rather than holistic approach to human nature, resulting in this moral illusion that tricks our moral vision and paralyzes our moral agency. Moral motivation and justification require more than intellectual, sensual, or social dimensions of morality. What is necessary is a holistic approach to human nature that integrates the useful elements of these moral theories while fully quenching one's moral thirst. Only *Fitrah* outlook can deliver such a "drink", to which we now turn.

[66] Qur'anic parable, Chapter *An-Nour* "And as for those who disbelieve, their works are like a mirage in a plain which the thirsty man supposes to be water until he comes to it and finds it to be nothing, and he finds God there, Who pays him his account in full; and God is swift at reckoning." Holy Qur'an 24:39, see Abdullah Yusuf Ali translation C3011, 1879.

Chapter III: Life and Morality, the Interconnection

This chapter will examine the dynamic relationship between the purpose of life and moral motivation and justification. In the *Fitrah* outlook with *Fitrah* as its nodal nexus, morality integrates both the right and the good as two sides of the same coin. However, duty and desire ethics erroneously separate them, and their reintegration depends on an account of a meaningful life. I will therefore begin by exploring what makes life worth living. I will then show the connection between moral judgment and one's purpose in life, which ultimately unites the right and the good in an Islamic approach to virtue ethics in terms of the *Fitrah* outlook. I will define the Qur'anic methodology underlying this approach for the sciences of both man and nature.

Historically, what humans thought about morality was not just of theoretical interest, but had direct impact on their lives and interaction with others. It impinged on their perennial quest to give meaning to their lives. Every time this difficult issue arises in the contemporary world, I recall the image of Philip and the Persian rug from the novel *Of Human Bondage*.[67] After much reflection and contemplation, Philip concludes that life might be beautiful or confusing at times, but it is utterly meaningless. As Sartre quipped, "Man is a useless passion." Philip's conclusion has been echoed through many Western novels and movies.[68] In the recent Disney animation *Kung Fu Panda*,[69] sure enough, the

[67] William Maugham, *Of Human Bondage* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961). As quoted in Lang. page 1.

[68] Jeffrey Lang, *Even Angels Ask* (Maryland: Amana Publication, 1997), 1.

[69] Dream Works Animation SKG, *Kung Fu Panda*, 2008.

main character comes to the discovery that "there is no secret recipe." Life is very complex and has no purpose, or does it? Despite this modern and post-modern denial, there is still an instinctive need to see or discover the meaning of life. It is like a well without water into which one calls, and the echo of the emptiness keeps haunting mankind.

It is fair to say that the need to see our lives as meaningful has assumed the status of a self evident truth, especially since it is correlated with human happiness and the ability to survive. Victor Frank,[70] a Holocaust survivor, repeatedly declares that if one has a positive "why" to live, one will inevitably find a positive and productive "how" to live. But it cannot be just any "why". It must be one that he or she finds intellectually and spiritually compelling.

So let us look at *Fitrah* outlook with *Fitrah* as its nodal nexus, as it deals with this delicate question: What makes life meaningful? The question must be handled carefully because the answer will make or break our life. Unless the answer satisfies the *Fitrah*, inspires every element of our existence, and ultimate purpose in life, the answer will be deformed and bleak. The result, I will argue, is an integrated *Fitrah* outlook on life that will uphold man's objectives during life's journey.[71]

Given the human need to see life as meaningful, what are the foundations of a meaningful life? Of course, a full treatment of this question requires a multi-volume work rather than a thesis. Therefore, I will limit my exposition to a brief outline of the Islamic perspective to shed the light on the foundations of a "meaningful life".

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[70] Victor Frank, *Man's Search for Meaning*, trans. I. Lasch (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992) 3.

[71] This "transcends him beyond his generation, takes him further than his present, and most importantly, grants him more essence than his reality." Lang, *Even Angels Ask*, 38.

Based on the Islamic Tradition, there are three variables to this function if one might borrow a mathematical term, namely, God, man, and the cosmos.[72] For example, Ismail al-Faruqi argues that one can draw the foundation of an Islamic moral outlook from five Qur'anic principles: the unity of God, creation, truth, life, and humanity. These "principles of unity" belong to a theory of being, and hence form the ontological presuppositions of an Islamic theory of knowledge, or epistemology. The moral implications as understood by al Faruqi are as follows:[73]

> God creates everything in the universe according to a precise measure. Nothing is futile or devoid of meaning. The universe is governed by one cosmic order consisting of laws discoverable by human reason. Hence, the Muslim is not free to ascribe anything to accident or blind fate. The cosmic order brings unity into creation by linking the objects of the universe through two types of relations: cause-effect relationships and means-to-ends relationships. The Islamic beliefs that constitute the apodictic presuppositions of reason can never be contrary to reason. Hence, facts disclosed by revelation should always accord with those discovered by reason and experience. The universe has been made subservient to humanity so that the whole range of nature is capable of receiving humanity's efficacy, of suffering change at its initiative, or of being transformed into any pattern that humanity desires. The meanings of the Islamic revelation are eternally anchored in two solid rocks: Arabic lexicography and syntax on the one hand, and reality on the other. Since the patterns of God's creation are infinite, no inquiry into the nature of creation is ultimate or conclusive. Hence, openness to new evidence and persistence of the quest are necessary characteristics of the Islamic mind. While laws of necessity govern nature's behavior, human action is subject to laws of freedom. While the former are immutable, the latter are manifested in history through human agency.[74]

Thus, one might write mathematically: "meaningful life" = f (x, y, z), in which x is man, y is the cosmos, and z the Supreme Creator of both.[75] Indeed, for over a thousand years, Islamic thinkers spoke about the correspondence between the Qur'an that we carry which is written and bound (*al-Qur'an al-tadwini*) and the cosmic Qur'an (*al-Qur'an al-takwini*), the whole of creation in which each page reveals a truth. Accordingly, both the

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[72] For more analysis on this relationship see William Chittick, *Science of the Cosmos, Science of the Soul.*

[73] Louay Safi, "The Quest for an Islamic Methodology: The Islamization of Knowledge Project in Its Second Decade," AJISS, 10, no. 1, (1993): 25-26.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Ibid.

verses of the written *Qur'an*, as well as the signs of God in nature and ourselves are called *ayat* of God (corresponding to *vestigia Dei* in Christian thought). Although the book of nature is a revealed scripture in this sense, Seyyed Hossein Nasr also points out that it contains "a truth we do not understand unless we accept the first *Qur'an* in the same way that the truth of the first *Qur'an* is not understood by the person who doesn't have faith in the *Qur'an*".[76] This Qur'anic approach to man and nature is based on certain fundamental premises, which build up as follows:[77]

1. This world, the entire Universe and man's existence in it, in fact the whole of Creation, are not mere accidents of history or products of a fortuitous natural world. The Universe has been created with a purpose. It is a law-governed Universe and the creation of a Kind, Merciful, all-Powerful Creator, and Master, i.e. God. Life is purposive. There is a moral order in the Universe and a moral law running beneath the entire drama of physical existence.

2. God is not just a Creator who, for all practical purposes, retired after creating the Universe and man. He is also the Sustainer, the Provider, the Ruler, and the Master of all that exists. His authority is supreme and unrelenting. He is One and Unique. He alone is the Creator, the Lord, the Law-Giver, and the Sovereign. Everything else is His Creation and is governed by His Law, the violation of His Will and His Law being responsible for whatever disorder or disarray is found in the world. All that conforms to His Will is in harmony with Reality and is in a state of peace and tranquility.

[76] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Islam and the Environment" lecture at Georgetown University, Qatar.

[77] Thomas B. Irvin, *The Qur'an: Basic Teaching* (United Kingdom: The Islamic Foundation, 1979), 16.

3. The Creator of the Universe established man on this earth as His representative, His deputy (*khalifah*). He endowed man with the capacity to know and to judge. Man has been given the powers of thinking, understanding, and the ability to distinguish between good and evil. He has been granted the faculty to discern, distinguish, and the freedom to choose for himself. He enjoys a kind of autonomy – a free will to use his latent power in the exercise of his moral judgment. While investing man with this faculty and conferring on him the responsibility of acting as His representative, God made clear to him that He alone was the Master and the Sovereign and that He alone merited man's worship, adoration, and obedience.[78]

4. This is the position of man and the choice open to him, but he is not left in darkness to discover the right path through trial and error alone. He is endowed with a intelligence comprised of reason and intellect to distinguish between right and wrong and to organize his faculties and resources for the achievement of his objectives. He is also provided with Divine Guidance to have some knowledge of Reality and the Criterion for truth.

5. God does not force man to follow the right path. It would be inconsistent with the autonomy conferred by God upon man and also with the fact that God has granted him a fixed term to offer his own response to the guidance given to him.

6. The messengers appeared in different lands and among different nations and the process continued for thousands of years. They all advocated one religion based on the Oneness of God and accountability on the Day of Judgment and subscribed to one way of life – the right way, which was shown to man on the first day. They all received

[78] Abul Ala Mawdudi, *Tafhim al Qur'an* (United Kingdom: Islamic Foundation, 2006), see Introduction.

guidance from the same source and followed the same moral principles originally established for man.

7. This process culminated with the designation of Muhammad of Arabia for this mission. His audience was the common man, including those followers of earlier prophets who had gone astray.

Consequently, Man is considered as an intelligent and moral agent and is the bearer of meaning and value as he implements his *Fitrah* outlook, with *Fitrah* as its nodal nexus. Man is the best of all creation of God, who has given him the highest degree of respect and dignity among all His creatures. Every individual is equally responsible for institutionalizing values in a civilization, and is also accountable to God for every kind of action.

Muslim scholars have thus maintained throughout the centuries that the Qur'an is the speech of God sent down upon the last Prophet Muhammad through the Archangel Gabriel in its precise wording and transmitted to us by numerous persons (*tawatur*), both orally and textually. In fact, the Arabic word for 'Qur'an' is derived from the root *qara'a*, which means "to read", "to recite", etc… Qur'an is a verbal noun and hence, means the "reading" or "recitation". As used in the Qur'an itself, the word refers to the revelation from God in the sonoral sense and is not restricted to the written form in the shape of a book as we have it before us today. However, it does denote revelation exclusively to the Prophet of Islam, while revelation to other prophets is referred to by different names (e.g. *taurat, injil, kitab,* etc…).[79]

[79] Von Denffer, A., 5.

The Qur'an has certain features which make it unique and of inimitable quality for Muslims. This inimitability is called *i'jaz al-Qur'an*, the 'miraculous nature' of the Qur'an. The word *i'jaz* is derived from the root '*ajaza'* which has various meanings, ranging from "to be incapable", "to make powerless", "to be impossible", "to be inimitable". In technical language, it means the inimitable and unique nature of the Qur'an which leaves its opponents powerless or incapable of meeting the challenge which the revelation poses to them.[80] The Qur'an is thus not only inimitable and unique, but protected by God from corruption.[81]

This divine book answers all the questions regarding man, the universe, their beginning and end. Consequently, there are three worlds that interact with one another: 1) the Qur'an that guides, 2) the human being that reads and is responsible to be a good steward, and 3) the universe, which is the place of man's action to establish civilization (*imran*). It follows naturally that to "MapQuest" one's disposition in life, one needs all three coordinates. The more a person comprehends himself, the more ethical one becomes, because there is a basic connection between one's understanding of the meaning of life and the exercise of one's moral judgment. Such an integrated outlook can transform earthly existence into an educational and developmental stage for the hereafter.[82] The Qur'an states:

> And when your Lord said to the angels, "I am appointing on earth a vicegerent", they said, "What, will You appoint therein one who will do corruption therein and shed blood, while we glorify You with praise and sanctify You?"; He said, "Assuredly, I know what you know not". And He taught Adam the names, all of them. (Holy Qur'an 2:30-32).

[80] Ibid, 147.

[81] Ibid, 4.

[82] This is Qur'an theme in the story of creation.

The Islamic theory of morality asserts that "our willing is not inspired by our desires alone, fundamentally it is inspired by the truth, and this is independent of our immediate interests".[83] Happiness in this view is an *effect* which constantly accompanies virtue, with truth as a motivating cause. Indeed, "sensible beauties are situated outside the soul, and their meeting with it is more or less accidental; if the soul wishes to be happy in an unconditional and permanent fashion, it must carry the beautiful within itself."[84] Consequently, spiritual "needs" and corresponding "duties" as two sides of the same coin, in which case there is no divergence between the "right" and the "good". From this perspective, psychological hedonism "rationalizes the sacrifice of spiritual and other needs for false happiness based on inferior intentions, providing a theory of rationality and welfare of the 'lower soul' (the *nafs al-ammārah* in Qur'ānic terms)".[85]

Thus, morality does not originate in reason or passions alone, for both play a crucial role within the *Fitrah* outlook. While the first helps us discover morality, cling to it, and live up to it, the latter makes us fall in love with morality and nurture it, sustaining one's relation with the self, others, and the universe. Moral perfection is thus the goal of both reason and passion. This way we are able to adjudicate between two contrasting feelings as alluded to by David McNaughton:

> There are two contrasting feelings about our moral life that all of us share to a certain extent. On the one side, we often feel that morality is an area of personal decision; a realm in which each of us has the right to make up his or her own mind about what to do. While other people may offer advice on what we should do and what moral principles we should adopt they have no authority to tell us how to live our lives. There are no moral experts…This view of moral choice sits unhappily with the second feeling that we all share,

[83] Frithjof Schuon, *Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts*, 93.

[84] Frithjof Schuon, *Esotericism as Principle and Way*, 94.

[85] Waleed El-Ansary, "The Spiritual Significance of Jihad in the Islamic Approach to Markets and the Environment," *George Washington University: PhD Dissertation* (2006): 40.

> namely that it is often difficult, when faced with some pressing and perplexing moral problem, to discover which answer is the right one.[86]

Our moral phenomenology or daily experience of morality suggests that our inability to act coherently when faced with contradictory principles, such as lying to save a life, can be resolved when we apply the *Fitrah* outlook. While a duty-ethic may have great difficulty with this case, a desire-ethic may have the opposite problem of justifying the murder of an innocent person for social benefit. The solution to each dilemma comes when reason and feeling complement rather than compete with one another.[87]

From this point of view, *Fitrah* aided with the help of the macrocosmic and microcosmic texts (the universe and the human state)[88] and the written text (Qur'anic revelation)[89] will function correctly to give the proper moral "reading". The agent is able to recognize the nature of right as a whole cluster of terms denoting the concept of moral goodness, i.e. goodness, righteousness, equity, justice, truth, piety, and most importantly, *ma'ruf*. Literally, this term means "known by" and is approved by the *Fitrah* as the morality control agent, or "indicator".

Since *Fitrah* signifies the natural constitution with which a child is created in his mother's womb, including the faculty of knowing God and inherent capacity or innate disposition to accept the ultimate truth, it comes close in signification to what St. Thomas

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[86] David McNaughton, *Moral Vision* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1988), 3-4.

[87] The Qur'anic term is *Fu'ad* for this unique union. "And do not pursue that of which you have no knowledge. Indeed the hearing and the sight and the heart — of each of these it will be asked." Holy Qur'an 17:36

[88] Continuous reference to scientific enquiry and self-discovery are one third of the verses of the Qur'an, i.e. more than 2000 of it's over 6000 verses.

[89] The Qur'an asserts that all revealed books (Torah/Gospel/Psalms) were sent to be as a manual that facilitates and not complicates man's existence. This idea will be discuss fully in chapter three when presenting Qur'an as guidance.

Aquinas would call *synderesis.*[90] *Fitrah* is thus the source of universal guidance and is connected with the very creation of man as a creature possessing choice and free volition.[91] It is the capacity to affirm moral laws. Accordingly, there is a concurrence between *Fitrah* and reasoning, and a harmony between *Fitrah* and sound, moral judgment. In other words, *Fitrah* is as objective and universal as reasoning, and as such, *Fitrah* is the capacity to exercise rational choice in matters of [morality] and faith.[92] It is engraved in the soul of the agent[93] and is the seat of consciousness, thoughts, volition, and feelings.[94] The heart is the receptacle of the *Fitrah*,[95] though it could be "veiled", or even dulled.

Furthermore, *Fitrah* is an "inward stance" according to which the moral agent accepts personal responsibility for upholding moral laws. It is the source of the unabated sense of personal responsibility which lies at the heart of the agent's moral commitment.[96] Every agent has it, and morality is part of it. Therefore, the question is no longer "what is the motive of being moral?" Rather, being moral *is* the motive, the drive, and the force. It is the engine that pushes one to act morally. Therefore, when a person sees starving people on TV, regardless of one's action or inaction, one is moved. But what moved him or her?

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[90] Ibid., 65.

[91] Sachedina, *Human Rights and the Conflict of Cultures,* 65.

[92] Ibid.

[93] Ibid., 69.

[94] "And [by] the soul and the One Who proportioned it, and inspired to discern its vices and piety. Successful indeed will be the one who purifies it, and he will indeed have failed he who eclipses it." Holy Qur'an 91:7-10

[95] "Assuredly there is in that a reminder for him who has a heart, or gives ear in [full] witness." Holy Qur'an 50:37

[96] Sachedina, *Human Right and the Conflict of Cultures,* 66.

It is one's *Fitrah*. Intention is a decision to act or not to act, while one's *Fitrah* reaction is an indication of being moral from acts of kindness ranging from removing banana skins from the road[97] to sacrificing oneself for a project.

Fitrah is not therefore like gravity or friction, because these physical laws can be changed or removed as laws of God. *Fitrah* is indestructible and simply accompanies the soul when it leaves the body to return to its Maker. This moral argument therefore has nothing to do with a divine command theory in which God could theoretically reverse all "laws of morality", because His Will cannot contradict His Essence.

Muslims thus recognize *Fitrah* as the highest gift one can have. It is one's built-in, standing criterion for clear moral judgment between right and wrong aided with the infinite Book of Nature (creation) and a definite scripture (revelation). As Nasr points out:

> … this is no license for rationalism and an *ad hoc* treatment of the *Shari'ah* as judged by human reason, because man can reach *tawhid* through his own '*aql* [intelligence] only under the condition that his '*aql* is in a wholesome state (*salim*). And it is precisely the *Shari'ah* whose practice removes the obstacles in the soul which prevent the correct functioning of the intellect and obscure its vision. It is the *Shari'ah* that guarantees the wholesomeness of the intellect so that to change the *Shari'ah* through the judgment of human reason with the excuse that the Qur'an has ordered man to use his intellectual faculties, is no more sophistry and a chimerical manner of leading simple souls astray.[98]

The *Shari'ah*, explained in the *Qur'an* and exemplified by the model of the Prophet's life, is the means whereby the moral agent may practice his moral *Fitrah* outlook principles. The appropriate moral path for the agent lies in the adoption of personal and social laws particular to his own *Fitrah* (or innate nature), and in avoiding people who have become "denaturalized" by following their own passions. *Fitrah* does not deny the

[97] One of the sayings of the Prophet of Islam is that to remove any obstacle or harm from the road is an act of charity. Reported by Bukhari and Muslim.

[98] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Life and Thought*, (Albany: Sate University of New York Press, 1981) 26.

agent's feelings or passions, but rather it accords each its proper due and allows the moral agent's spiritual and material needs to be fulfilled in a harmonious fashion. Therefore, the only laws useful to man are those which are made according to his inherent nature. In fact, Islam is called *deen al-fitrah*, "the religion of human nature", because its laws (*Shari'ah*) and its teachings are in full accord with the normal and natural inclination of the human *Fitrah.*

Therefore, man uses his morality to see beyond the chimpanzees and to learn the true spiritual meaning of nature as a sign, or *ayah*, of God, finding his eternal future in posthumous states. *Fitrah* is the first link in a long chain during the moral journey. The moral agent recognizes mankind as united by a common nature, sharing in the life of the community. He is acquainted with their actions and sympathizes with their joys and sorrows. This is the true manifestation of his moral agency. The best way to serve his Maker (*Fatir)* is to be moral to his fellow human beings, as I shall explain shortly.

With this capacity, the moral agent is able to perceive and discern that morality is not simply a "list of don'ts". For example, a husband can answer his wife "yes", she is the most beautiful person he has met, but "no", an ugly dress is not beautiful, and some unpalatable cooking is not delicious. *Fitrah* determines both answers. The former is her *Fitrah* in the sense that this is the way she was created, and the latter is the husband's *Fitrah* in terms of his morality.

Let us take the virtue of truthfulness to further illustrate this point, clarifying the comprehensive nature of virtue. According to the Islamic tradition, the believer knows that his Creator is the most truthful.[99] Therefore, a Muslim understands the importance

[99] One of God's attributes is The Truthful. "Say: 'God has spoken the truth, therefore follow the creed of Abraham, a hanīf, and he was not an idolater'." Holy Qur'an 3:95

and significance of this virtue, for it is no longer confined to the truthfulness of the tongue, but rather to one's total moral being. He is continuously praying: "My Lord, make me enter with a veritable entrance, and bring me out with a veritable departure. And grant me from yourself a favorable authority". Holy Qur'an (17:80). The moral agent acknowledges the need for truthfulness in every act of entrance or departure. His moral duty is truthfulness whenever he enters the home, or starts his school or work. Truthfulness is never a mere means, but is always also an end in social contracts, in religious covenants, and all business transactions. This includes marriage or divorce, and while one is a resident or on travel. Hence, truthfulness permeates every facet of his moral agency.

Given this comprehensiveness, truthfulness is manifested in many ways. The first is obviously the truthfulness of the tongue in which the moral agent is always asking his Creator to help him keep his tongue truthful. He is constantly guarding himself against hypocrisy and the temptation it throws his way. He understands that hypocrisy is a source of weakness and a danger to his moral health and existence.[100] Secondly, there are multiple ways in which truthfulness can be manifested in interaction with others.[101] The moral agent is not only truthful with his fellow human beings in words, but truthful as he looks and smiles at them, and even when he laughs with them. He is truthful with his love and advice to them. Most importantly, the agent is truthful when his fellow men are present or absent. He is truthful with every move, as the aforementioned Qur'anic verse

[100] Based on the following saying of the Prophet, "The signs of a hypocrite are three: Whenever he speaks he tells a lie; whenever he is entrusted he proves dishonest; whenever he promises he breaks his promise." Sahih Bukhari, Book 51: 12.

[101] "Whoever cheats is not from among us (the believers)". Saying of the prophet reported by Bukhari and Muslim.

demands of him. His *Fitrah* supplies him compelling reasons to be truthful with all and a full rationale for doing so.

Then there is truthfulness in intention, for the moral agent's action is judged by his intention.[102] His Lord is the only one who knows his intention; therefore, in order to be truthful to God, one must have the right intention. Indeed, any legal act performed with the right intention is considered fundamentally an act of worship in Islam.[103] A Muslim could not therefore be fundamentally virtuous without being truthful.

Another manifestation of truthfulness is in the will, which is known intuitively to the agent in the process of believing, desiring, and thinking.[104] The *Fitrah* outlook gives the will a distinct feature that differs from wish or desire. Fakhry explains the distinction between will and desire in the following way:

> (a) will determines the occurrence of the action, but desire does not, (b) will may be directed towards a repugnant object, but desire may not, (c) enjoyment is a big product of desire, but not of will, (d) desire may grow or wane, whereas the will remains constant, and (e) will is within our power, but desire is not. [105]

Likewise, Fakhry asserts that will is different from wish, since only the latter can have a bearing on the past.[106] Truthfulness of the will helps one along the moral path despite the moral "hurricane" in which an agent may find himself when facing a dilemma. He does not have to resort to the "Doctrine of Double Effect" or DDE as it is known in philosophical ethics. This doctrine is best defined by Alison McIntyre:

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[102] According to the Prophet, all actions are judged by their intention.

[103] Not to be confused with "the power of a coercive power that overrides individual passions with its fearful ability to punish but rather out of love to the Creator."

[104] See Majid Fakhary, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, 38.

[105] Ibid.

[106] Ibid.

> Proponents of the Doctrine Effect make two claims (1) it is sometimes permissible to bring a harm as a merely foreseen side effect of an action aimed at some good end, even though it would not have been permissible to bring about the same harm as a means to that end, and (2) this is so because of the moral significance of the distinction between intending and foreseeing a harmful consequence of one's own agency. Thus Double Effect (henceforth DE) rests on a claim about the conditions of permissible action on a distinction between two different ways of bringing about a harmful event: instrumentally, as a mean to a good end, and incidentally, as a side effect of pursing a good end.[107]

This helps resolve the ethical problem of the trolley case put forward by Philippa Foot:

> Suppose that the only possible way to steer a runaway trolley is to move it from one track to another. One man is working on the first track, and five men are working on the other. Anyone working on the track the trolley enters will be killed. Most people would accept that the driver should steer the trolley to the track on which only one person is working because the death of five persons is worse than the death of one person. Now suppose that the trolley, left [by] itself, will enter the track on which five men are working and kill them. If you are a bystander who can change the course of the trolley, would it be morally required or morally permissible to interfere to switch the trolley to the other track, on which only one person would be killed?[108]

In this example, utilitarian and Islamic virtue ethics would agree that it is morally required to switch trolley tracks to save the five people.

However, this is justified on different grounds, which becomes clear if we imagine the case in which a "big, fat man" could be dropped from a bridge over the tracks to stop the trolley from hitting the five people. Bentham would argue that there is no problem with sacrificing the fat man to stop the trolley, whereas Islamic virtue ethics will agree with Kant in denying that this is morally acceptable. The *Fitrah* outlook, like Kant, dictates that no one should be viewed only as a means, and there is no "consequentiality profile" that can justify such a "sacrifice". There is a difference between two events in which one is choosing the "lesser evil" in the case of switching the tracks, and an action in which one commits murder in the case of the fat man. The *Fitrah* outlook thus delivers distinctions characterizing various relationships between the moral

[107] Alison McIntyre, "Doing Away with Double Effect," *Ethics* 111 (2001): 219.

[108] Philippa Foot, "The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of the Double Effect," *Oxford Review* (1967): 5.

agent and harms in multiple ways. Truthfulness carries moral weight for the agent whether acting or permitting, whether the consequences are intended or only foreseen. This illustrates how any agreement between the *Fitrah* outlook and desire and duty ethics is accidental rather than essential, because it is based on different principles that reveal themselves in different conclusions depending on the case.

But the most salient aspect of truthfulness for the agent is its manifestation in the agent's condition and religious rituals. Being oneself and being sincere in worship to one's Creator is the ultimate end. Consequently, when the moral agent falls into lying as a result of hardness or weakness, his *Fitrah* outlook immediately reminds him to come back to the moral path, remembering the saying of the Prophet:

> You must speak the truth, for the truth leads to virtue, and virtue leads to Paradise. One who always speaks the truth and means the truth is recorded as truthful with Allah. Keep away from the lie, for the lie leads to evil, and evil leads to the Hell Fire, and one who continually tells a lie and intends to lie is recorded with Allah as a liar.[109]

The comprehensiveness of truthfulness is thus with the agent himself, his fellow human beings, and most of all, with his Creator. Morality is integral to the agent rather than an extraneous barnacle, because the right and the good are united in a virtuous "state of being", as previously discussed. Thus, the Islamic "categorical imperative" is not "don't tell a lie", but "be among those who are truthful".[110] Here, the imperative is transformed.

Similarly, courage is no longer simply "the right amount of willingness to face danger", the mean between the deficiency of cowardice and the excess of foolhardiness. It is the willingness to come to the rescue of the truth where others have remained silent,

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[109] Prophet's saying reported by Bukhari and Muslim.

[110] "O you, who believe, fear God and be with those who are truthful." Holy Qur'an 9:119

and to take a stand in the ethical battle field between truth and falsehood.[111] Courage deals with principles, not perception.[112]

Likewise, generosity is neither "the right amount of willingness to share", nor the "mean between misery and prodigality". It is rather the giving of oneself, one's skills, or property at the proper place and the proper time without any remorse. Giving becomes the essence of living a moral life.

All other virtues can be implemented in the same manner. The *Fitrah* outlook thus resolves the problem of whether virtue is a matter of intention rather than performance, attitude rather than action, a mean between excess and deficiency. It provides the agent a clear perception of the moral life and the universe based on the agent's creation in harmony and balance with all that exists. *Fitrah* implementation thereby grants complete liberation of moral agency from all forms of bondage and idolatry.[113] It frees one's mind and clears one's conscience.

But a critic might question whether or not the idea of *Fitrah* implies a "one-size-fits-all" morality. If everyone develops the *Fitrah* to a certain degree, will we end up with a single moral code? The answer is no. We are different in our makeup and composition inwardly and outwardly, e.g. gender, race, culture, religion, and so forth. The moral agent recognizes there is strength in diversity and will not use a Procrustean bed[114] to eliminate

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[111] As psychotherapist Sheldon Kopp notes, "all the significant battles are waged within self."

[112] One person with courage is a majority as the Holy Quran asserts in Abraham's case: "Truly Abraham was a community, obedient to God, a hanīf, and he was not of the idolaters." Holy Qur'an 16:120

[113] Another Qura'nic theme, "Say: 'Who delivers you from the darkness of the land and the sea; you call upon Him openly and secretly: Verily, if You deliver us from this, we shall truly be among the thankful.'" Holy Qur'an 6:163

[114] This is the story of Procrustes and his philosophical counterparts dealing with diversity among different cases. Explain the story.

differences in customs across cultures. Humanity will never become uniform[115] even if everyone is on an equal moral level, i.e. equally "*fitri*". As Seyyed Hossein Nasr suggests, outward differences may even reflect identical intentions. Christians, for example, take off their hats upon entering a church, whereas Jews and Muslims may put on a "skull cap". Although these actions appear contradictory, they reflect humility and have the same intent. Sachedina therefore asserts that:

> The Qur'an acknowledges the diversity of the paths adopted by different people despite the unity of their origin… In other words, the unity of the path is at the level of universal guidance, that which is imprinted upon human beings by God and by virtue of which they all are one nation. At the same time, diversity exists at the level of the particular guidance proclaimed by the prophets. Accordingly, humankind comes to be divided into different religious communities as its members adhere to one or another revelation.[116]

He further argues that this diversity is a divinely approved mystery which becomes clear when the Qur'an points out:

> Mankind were one community, and God sent (unto them) prophets as bearers of good tidings and as warners, and revealed therewith the Scripture with the truth that it might judge between mankind concerning that wherein they differed. And only those unto whom (the Scripture) was given differed concerning it, after clear proofs had come unto them, through hatred one of another. And God by His Will guided those who believe unto the truth of that concerning which they differed. God guideth whom He will unto a straight path. (Holy Qur'an 2:213)

Despite the fact that all human beings start at the same level of *Fitrah*, each begins the race at different times. Some might even give up the moral "race" altogether as a result of upbringing or negative cultural influences. It is also possible that the *Fitrah* itself can be dulled and "rusted". "No indeed! Rather there has slayed their hearts that which they earned." [117]

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[115] "Had your Lord willed, He would have made mankind one community, but they continue to differ," Holy Qur'an 11:118, and "And if your Lord willed, all who are in the earth would have believed together. Would you then compel people until they are believers?" Holy Qur'an 10:99

[116] Sachedina, *Human Rights and the Conflicts of Cultures*, 74.

[117] Holy Qur'an 83:14

That is an "awful" thing, but it is not an irreversible problem. Moreover, no one comes with a "defected" *Fitrah*, since the Creator (*Fatir*) does not have any "recalls". He gets it right the first time, for "Should He not know what He created? And He is the Subtle, the Aware." (67:14)

Can the presence of a few insane or mentally handicapped individuals undermine such a claim? Are there other characteristics which are unique to human beings, such as telling jokes, which would undermine a functional approach based on the uniqueness of the human state? If so, should one consider all unique traits to build a theory of morality? In this case, we have indeed abandoned our normative base. Luckily, this is not the case at all. Aristotle's argument highlighting human rationality and the Islamic argument highlighting the *Fitrah* are immune to such a critique, since the function argument provides the agent the proper tool to maneuver in the ethical field.

Here one might mistakenly argue that the *Fitrah* is biological and subject to variation between people, analogous to tastes, making morality arbitrary and subjective. This would be a non-normative basis for making normative claims, i.e. the "naturalistic fallacy" of deriving an "ought" from an "is". However, this is not the case, since the facts entail human functions, making values and facts two sides of the same coin in a hierarchy of levels of reality.

"Morality" is therefore real and absolute with a capital M, not a small m.[118] The *Fitrah* outlook asserts that "Morality" is more than a pattern or quality of conduct or code, since it is a set of moral convictions ingrained in the human soul. It is something

[118] William K. Frankena, *Thinking about Morality* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1980) 17.

the person not only does, but is.[119] Morality is the business of being, knowing, and doing. A person has functional morality only when he has developed his moral capacity to a level where the gap between knowing and doing is practically nonexistent. Therefore, Islamic virtue ethics emphasizes that taking the moral point of view entails not simply subscribing to and judging things in terms of a value system, but also having a disposition to live by this moral judgment, to be fully good (*Salih*) and do good (*Muslih*).

Morality is not an appearance or an illusion as J. L. Mackie wants us to believe.[120] Morality is not invented by us, an expression of emotions and feelings as the non-cognitivists want to assert, but is there to be discovered and affirmed by the *Fitrah* outlook. The *Fitrah* propositions are universal, objective, and can be independent of location and culture depending on the moral issue.

Moral skepticism based on moral disagreement between cultures is not a valid conclusion. The non-cognitivist attempt to limit philosophical ethics to a description of the mechanism of the moral act without providing a criterion for right or wrong is meaningless from the Islamic point of view. As Derek Parfit points out, the fact that there is a disagreement about x does not necessarily mean that x is relative.[121] The existence of a moral yard stick external to a culture is necessary to measure the moral improvement of the culture, without which there would be no advance from this point of view.[122]

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[119] Ibid., 18.

[120] John Leslie Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right & Wrong* (London: Penguin Books, 1977), 15-49.

[121] Derek Parfit, *Reason and Persons* (London: Oxford University Press, 1984), 452-454.

[122] Base on McNaughton's four challenges to non-cognitivism (truth, skepticism, observation, appearance and reality). See David McNaughton, *Moral Vision* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1988), 3-5.

Hence, in understanding the Islamic *Fitrah* outlook, the key idea is that virtues are qualitative as well as quantitative traits in which action is a real indicator of character.[123] Indeed, the moral agent's action and character are inseparable. His character determines who he is. Who he is determines what he sees. What he sees determines what he does.[124] The smaller the gap between action and character, the better resolution[125] the *Fitrah* outlook is. Moreover, there are universally valuable traits[126] that are ideal for all people since *Fitrah* is in everyone, i.e. the agent who is good (*Salih*) and always doing the good (*Muslih*).[127] In the final analysis, the more authentic the explanation of oneself, the world, and the Creator, the more coherent the picture of morality is, f(x, y, z). One not only has moral sight, but an insight into morality, providing what is essential to be a well-functioning or flourishing individual.

Achieving this is not easy given the "ups and downs of life". But man is able to grow through suffering and hardship.[128] One does not have to view such trials and tribulations as impenetrable mysteries, for they are inevitable and sometimes essential to moral growth.[129] Man's earthly existence is not a punishment to satisfy the whims of the Maker

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[123] Ibid., 4

[124] Ibid.

[125] To borrow the "HD" terminology, i.e. full high definition. 1080 P

[126] The Qur'anic term is *Urf*: the well known. "Indulge [people] with forgiveness, and enjoin kindness, and turn away from the ignorant." Holy Qur'an 7:199

[127] "Indulge [people] with forgiveness, and enjoin kindness, and turn away from the ignorant". Holy Qur'an 7:199

[128] The Qur'an asserts that life never meant to be easy. "Uphill climb." See Holy Qur'an 90:4-17

[129] Lang, 32.

of the universe.[130] It is *Istikhlaf,* which is God's appointment of humanity as his vicegerent (*khalifah*) on earth. The Qur'an asserts this element from the beginning of man's creation, as previously discussed.[131] Human life is thus *Ibtila',* which means trial by either affliction or abundance.[132] Man does his best in the exercise of morality, giving, and self sacrifice, and the *Tawfeeq* (success and prosperity) and *Tamkeen* (God's aid) is certainly guaranteed. The *Fitrah* outlook's role is simply to convince the mind, as well as persuade the heart, to carry on with the "moral mission" equipped with the moral hearing, moral sight, and moral intelligence.[133]

[130] Ibid., 41.

[131] Holy Qur'an 2:30

[132] Holy Qur'an 3:186; 21:35; 89:15-16

[133] "And God brought you forth from the bellies of your mothers while you did not know anything, and He gave you hearing and sight and hearts that perhaps you might give thanks." Holy Qur'an 16:78

Chapter IV: Qur'anic Methodology for the *Fitrah* Outlook

The Qur'anic methodology concerning the *Fitrah* outlook emphasizes a hierarchy of complementary ways of learning about the world and our selves, or the macrocosmic and microcosmic orders of reality. This hierarchy ranges from reason and the senses at the base to revelation (*Wahy*) at its peak, the transmitted (*naqli*) knowledge from the Divine Reality.

Contrary to other theories of morality, the Qur'anic methodology allows for the unity, plurality, and hierarchy of methods in the explanation and understanding of morality. Desire-ethics such as those espoused by Bentham, Mill, and others assert unity of method, but deny the plurality and hierarchy of methods. Meanwhile, duty-ethics assert the plurality of methods, but deny unity and hierarchy, i.e. there is one method for the natural sciences and another method for the human sciences. Islamic virtue ethics is different, since it integrates all three. Therefore, there are no contradictions between the sciences and revelation (*Wahy*), i.e. there is no dichotomy between the *Qur'an* and science, any more than there is a dichotomy between the nature of right and the good.

It is the outcome of the use of the intellect, reason, and the senses which allows for the unity, plurality, and hierarchy of methods.[134] In this hierarchy of human faculties, the senses occupy the lowest realm, reason and other faculties of the soul the intermediate

[134] For a detailed study of the implications of the unity and hierarchy of methods for the classification of sciences, see Osman Bakar, *Classification of Knowledge in Islam.*

realm, and the intellect (as used in its original sense) the highest level.[135] Reason is only a mental reflection of the intellect according to this view. Reason is abstract, whereas the intellect is concrete like the senses, but on the level of the intelligence.[136] As Nasr explains:

> the faculty of intellection symbolized by 'the eye of the heart' … 'sees' the spiritual world in a direct manner much like the physical eye which possesses the same power in the sensible world and in opposition to the faculty of reason which functions discursively and 'knows' indirectly.[137]

It is very important to emphasize that knowledge based on the intellect does not imply "non-verifiable… truth claims," as some allege.[138]

Accordingly, reason and the senses may be sufficient to answer certain philosophical questions, but they are not sufficient for theory of moral knowledge.[139] In the best case,

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[135] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Life and Thought* (Lahore, Pakistan: Suhail Academy, 1999), 200-201.

[136] On the distinction between reason and the intellect, see for instance Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), Chapters 4 and 5.

[137] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Life and Thought*, 200-201.

[138] Nasr explains the crucial difference as follows:

> (the) same rationalist who speaks of the non-verifiable nature of truth claims by traditional philosophers accepts completely the truth claims of quantum mechanics without seeking to verify it himself. He simply trusts the physicist and not the metaphysicist for reasons which are not rational but ideological and cultural.
>
> Furthermore, in the same way that the truth claims of quantum mechanics are verifiable provided one is willing to devote years of study to them, the "truth claims" of metaphysics are likewise verifiable providing one is also willing to undergo the necessary training and preparation. The difference, however, lies in the fact that the study of quantum mechanics requires only the training of the mind and to some extent the eye, but that of metaphysics requires the education and training of man's whole being. In any case the so called "truth claims" of [such metaphysicians]… are certainly not non-verifiable unless one reduces verifiability to only the rationalistically proven or operationally definable, in which case many other things including the postulates upon which reasoning itself is based would also become non-verifiable.
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> See Mehdi Aminrazavi, "*Philosophia Perennis* and *Scientia Sacra* in a Postmodern World," *The Philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, p. 555. For Nasr's response, see "Reply to Mehdi Aminrazavi," pp. 563-570.

[139] For a complete discussion of Islamic as well as other traditional responses to secular approaches to science, see Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

reason and the senses can only falsify a moral theory, but cannot verify it. According to the Islamic philosophy of science, complete explanations require a hierarchy of complementary methods, and explanations based on a truncated approach are fragmented at best. Nasr explains this as follows:

Fragmented knowledge of human behavior is related to human nature in the same way that waves are related to the sea. There is certainly a relationship between them that is both causal and substantial. But unless one has a vision of the sea in its vastness and illimitable horizons – the sea which reflects the Infinite and its inimitable peace and calm – one cannot gain an essential knowledge of it through the study of its waves. Fragmented knowledge can be related to the whole only when there is already an intellectual vision of the whole.[140]

This is due to the inability of both reason and the senses to make universal claims. The Qura'nic methodology asserts that only the intellect can play such a role. The intellect can verify the nature of man as well as the philosophical presuppositions related to his existence. It offers both explanation and understanding:

In contrast to modern science which for the most part turned away from deduction to only observation and experimentation, the Islamic sciences sought to pursue different methods in accordance with the nature of the subject and questions and modes of understanding that subject. It was in fact possible to have several sciences dealing with the same subject but based on different methods and the hierarchy of knowledge which is so basic to the Islamic conception of the nature of knowledge. A tree could be studied from the point of view of botany, hence, observed and described, or medicine, hence, its

[140] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man* (Illinois: Kazi Publications, 2001), 6-7.

products tested and turned into drugs, or physics, hence its form and matter analyzed or even Sufism, hence contemplated, on might say, *sub specie aeternitatis*, that is in the presence of God.[141]

Therefore, the intellect is central to the Qur'anic methodology and the *Fitrah* outlook. It gives the complete picture, for as Osman Bakar points out, "It is one thing to admit the reality of a pluralistic methodology and to entertain its desirability; it is another to possess a unified vision of that pluralistic methodology".[142] He argues that the Qur'anic methodology does precisely that. He adds, "It is because of the lack of a unified vision in contemporary philosophy of science that all the positive intellectual gains that can possibly accrue from the new realization of what the creative process in modern science is, or is not, appear to have been lost in all sorts of philosophical interpretations."[143]

This Qur'anic methodology is flexible and comprehensive, not subject to the fluctuations of time and place. It transcends relative changes and remains valid in every age and environment. People are invited to observe their surroundings from the ground on which they stand to the horizon of the psyche and the cosmos. The Qur'an assigns to the senses a basic responsibility for every step taken by a Muslim in the fields of research, contemplation, knowledge, and experience. But the intellect, reasons, and the senses are jointly responsible for exploration, examination, inductive reasoning, and decision making, after which individuals will be put to the test, because they are essentially different from other living creatures. This gives a human life its value and its

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[141] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Reflections on Methodology in the Islamic Sciences," *Hamdard Islamicus Volume 3* (1981): 5.

[142] Bakar, *Tawhīd and Science: Essays on the History and Philosophy of Islamic Science*, 16.

[143] Ibid.

uniqueness, for when these powers and energies are activated, individuals will reach the peak of their scientific and religious potential. However, if these powers are not used, individuals may choose the meanest status for any human being, an "infrahuman" status that God did not desire after endowing them with hearing, sight, and hearts, the seat of the intellect as well as emotions.

Although human intelligence and divine revelation are integral categories and constituents of all kinds of knowledge, the main distinction is the place and the role of Revelation in the Islamic episteme. Most distinctive of all, the *Fitrah* puts revelation as central to the terms of such discourse and therefore, transmitted knowledge has a well-defined and concrete place in this *Fitrah* outlook. In short, reason and revelation are complementary, with revelation as the "quality control agent"; revelation serves as a divine confirmation of the truth, which in principle, can be arrived at through the intelligence.

There are thus no intrinsic contradictions between the *Qur'an* and science, just as there is no dichotomy between the nature of good and the nature of right. Science and scientific truth are not ultimate, but change continuously. The dynamism of scientific research and discovery means that the scientific truth of today will be seen in a different light tomorrow as new elements of knowledge become available. But scientific facts do constitute a perspective with all its variety and limitations on the true nature of things. At this point in time, there are perhaps many good examples to be cited for the concordance between science and the Qur'an on certain questions:

- That the earth was previously part of the sun and only after separation from it became a habitable place for mankind.[144]
- That all life originated from water.[145]
- That the universe was in the shape of a fiery gas (which the *Qur'an* calls *dukhan*).[146]
- That the oxygen content of the air is reduced at higher altitudes.[147]
- That in nature everything consists of complementary elements, not only man and animals, but also plants and even inorganic matter.[148]
- That the embryo in the womb is enclosed by three coverings.[149]
- That fertilization of certain plants is done by the wind.[150]
- Those microscopic organisms exist that are not visible to the naked eye, such as spermatozoon.[151]

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[144] "Have they not realized those who disbelieve, that the heavens and the earth were closed together and then We parted them, and We made, of water every living thing? Will they not then believe?" Holy Qur'an 21:30

[145] Holy Qur'an 21:30

[146] "Then He turned to the heaven when it was smoke, and He said to it and to the earth, 'Come both of you willingly, or unwillingly!' They said, 'We come willingly!'" Holy Qur'an 41:11

[147] "Whomever God desires to guide, He expands his breast to Islam; and whomever He desires to send astray, He makes his breast narrow and constricted, as if he were engaged in ascent to the heaven. So, God casts ignominy over those who do not believe." Holy Qur'an 6:125

[148] "Glory is to Him Who created all the pairs of what the earth produces, and of them, and of what they do not know." Holy Qur'an 36:36

[149] "He created you from a single soul, and then made from it its mate; and He sent down for you of the cattle, eight kinds. He creates you in your mothers' wombs, creation after creation in three fold darkness. That is God, your Lord. To Him belongs [all] sovereignty. There is no god except Him. Why then are you being turned away?" Holy Qur'an 39:6

[150] "And we send the winds as fertilizers, and send down out of the heaven water so that we give it to you to drink, for you are not the storers thereof." Holy Qur'an 15:22

[151] "Recite: In the Name of your Lord Who created, created man from a blood-clot. Recite: and your Lord is the Most Generous, Who taught by the pen taught man what he did not know." Holy Qur'an 96:1-5

- That each human being has permanent individual fingerprints.[152]

These are a few of many examples. Now let us move to the foundation of this holistic Qur'anic methodology: the Qur'an.

Muslims throughout centuries believe that the *Qur'an* is the living word of the living God, which consists of an inherent mystery and power to draw the human being to his own center, and thus, inspires one to live in accordance with this will. Indeed, the Qur'an is a challenge and a miracle that overwhelms people's hearts and causes their souls to marvel, thus paving the way for them to accept the message and respond to it with all their being. Hence, the destiny of Muslims is directly linked with the way Muslims understand the *Qur'an*.[153]

To know what the *Qur'an* really means one must collect its characteristics from the *Qur'an* itself. God mentioned thirty-four names of the *Qur'an* in His book. In short, the *Qur'an* is a manual explaining man's nature, his duties and responsibilities, the universe in which he lives in, and his Creator. The Qur'an clarifies man's mission as a *khalifah* (vicegerent) on earth to practice *khilafah* (vicegerency).

The *Qur'an* is a miracle according to Muslim scholars, because it fulfills the following five conditions:[154]

- No one else apart from God, the Master of the world, is able to reveal a book like it.
- It breaks the usual norms and differs from the laws of nature (not the laws of God).
- It serves as proof for the truth and credential of the messenger.

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[152] "Yes, indeed! We are able to reshape [even] his fingers!" Holy Qur'an 75:4

[153] Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, 9.

[154] Sabuni, *Tibyan*, 99.

- It does not contradict the messenger's way.
- The event happens through the messenger and no one else.

Consequently, Muslim scholars specializing in the Qur'anic sciences like al-Qurtubi (d. 656/1258), highlight various aspects of the *Qur'an's* miraculous nature, or *I'jaz*. He indicates in his commentary the following ten aspects of *i'jaz al-Qur'an:*

- Its language excels all other languages.
- Its style excels all other Arabic styles.
- Its comprehensiveness is unmatched.
- Its legislation is unsurpassed.
- Its narrations about the unknown can only result from revelation.
- Its lack of contradiction with sound natural sciences.
- Its fulfillment of all that it promises, both good tidings and threats regarding this life.
- The knowledge it comprises (both legal and natural).
- Its fulfillment of human needs.
- Its effect on the hearts of men.

Others prominent Qur'anic scholars such as al-Baqillani (d. 403/1013) in his book *I'jaz al-Qur'an* discuss three additional aspects:

1. The Unlettered Prophet, for Prophet Muhammad has been called '*ummi'* (he could neither read nor write).
2. Knowledge of the unseen world.
3. Lack of internal contradictions.

Muhammad Rasheed Rida[155](d. 1354/1935) adds two more aspects:

4. The order of its subjects.
5. Its influence on the Arabs and the believers.

Thus, the real features of the *Qur'an* as seen by all Muslims across history are its inimitable nature and God's *guidance* for mankind. Therefore, there is no better guidance than the *Qur'an*[156]. As Von Denffer asserts, "The miracle of the *Qur'an* lies in its being the guidance *(hidaya)*"[157]. This is what is claimed by the Qur'an, "Say (unto them): Then bring a scripture (*kitab*) from the presence of God that gives clearer guidance (*ahda*) than those so [that] I may follow it, if you are truthful".[158] The *Qur'an*, by claiming to be "unique guidance", transcends all superficial characteristics assigned to it by a finite human mind. As Ahmad suggests, the message of the *Qur'an* is extremely simple and remarkably clear: "Anyone who will seek guidance (*hidaya*) with an open mind, a non-colored vision, and unbiased ears will reach the truth".[159]

The *Qur'an* thus has the ability to create the finest form of human being and the best structure of family in any time or place. It also has tremendous impact on society and the establishment of nations.[160] Indeed, the miraculous nature of the Qur'an in the area of

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[155] Rashid Muhammad Rida, *The Muhammedan Revelation* (Alexandria: Al-Saadawi Publications, 1996), 69-79.

[156] Von Denffer, A., 152.

[157] Ibid., 9.

[158] Holy Qur'an 28:49

[159] A. Ahmad, "The Miracle called Qur'an at the mercy of Charlatans," *Al-Ittihad* (1978): 61-62.

[160] Taha Jaber Alwani, *The Qur'an: the Primary Source of Knowledge* (Herndon: IIIT, 1994), 15.

rulings (*ahkam*) and legislation are capable of forming a sound basis for a decent human life, as well as the basis of systems that are just, easy to understand, and practical.[161]

The *Qur'an* is thus a document that is mainly aimed at man to be able to love and develop his *Fitrah* outlook. It sneaks to the furthest corner of man's consciousness, penetrating every thought in the depth of the inner man. It whispers softly sometimes and commands vehemently at other times; demanding thought from man to think, reflect, ponder, contribute, analyze, and then act.[162] As Jeffrey Lang points out, "If the *Qur'an* is a guidance as it claims to be, then we should anticipate suggestions, guideposts, and touch stones that help us along the way. Thus, as the *Qur'an* might say, we must be willing not only to search the horizons, but also our own selves, until we know as much as we can to grasp the truth".[163]

[161] Ibid.

[162] The Qur'an scientific method: "hypothesizing and verification through experimentation" is highly encouraged and demanded.

[163] Lang, 24.

Chapter V: *Fitrah Outlook* and "A Common Word"

In this chapter, I shall show how the *Fitrah* outlook serves as a basis for establishing common ground with other religious traditions in the context of "A Common Word", summed up in the two supreme commandments to love God and to love the neighbor. Indeed, all religious traditions recognize an Ultimate Reality which is the Source of all morals. Once the *moral agent* understands his perception of himself and his moral mission, he is ready to intimately connect with others, their religions, and their communities. He simply has to exercise his *Fitrah* outlook with respect to the rest of the world's traditions. He has to get out of the shell of religious homogeneity. The question that must be answered here is what are the mechanisms involved, and what are the components of its structure? How can the moral agent put his moral outlook into practice with patience and consistency?

The fundamental starting point for the agent is the dictation of his *Fitrah* with regard to "others".[164] He mirrors the teaching of the Qur'an and the example of the Prophet of Islam in dealing with other faiths. A proper utilization of the *Fitrah* outlook helps the moral agent be intelligent and informed, to live more harmoniously with others. The *Fitrah* outlook's real life effect is defusing conflicts among adherents of different faiths and fostering conviviality in a pluralist environment. *Fitrah* outlook manifested in "A Common World" can play crucial role in healing wounds and inspiring hopes among all people of all faiths. It is the ethics of care, a state of genuine perception of others focused

[164] Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, 163.

on love as one of the ultimate virtues. This follows from Islamic law (*shariah*), the five goals of its intents, i.e. the preservation of self, mental state, religion, honor, and wealth, which are extended to cover all of humanity, regardless of their religion, natural origins, ethnicities… etc, since all humans share a mutual origin and dignity. "O mankind! Lo! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another. Lo! the noblest of you, in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct. Lo! Allah is Knower, Aware." (49:13) "Verily we have honored the Children of Adam." (17:70).

The first foundation of the *Fitrah* outlook in this context is that the essential message of all other traditions is universal. This unity is especially evident among the other Abrahamic faiths,[165] i.e., Judaism and Christianity. All these messages emanate from a single source,[166] "the mother of the book", or "the hidden book" (*umm al-kitab*). The moral agent understands that the differentiation among nations and the manifestation of different religions is a divine mercy, for if God so willed, He could surely bring them to one path.[167] Therefore, the moral agent does not only appreciate diversity, but embraces it as a sign of his Creator (*Fatir*).[168] Despite the considerable apparent differences among the world traditions, it is still possible to insist upon morality and the life of man beyond the grave. Man's duty is to seek common ground, not uniformity. Many rituals emphasize love and mercy as essential qualities of the divine, but assign different functions to their

[165] As Seyyed Hossein Nasr always emphasizes that although the external forms are different, there are remarkable similarities.

[166] Holy Qur'an 43:4, 13:39, 56:78

[167] Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, 163.

[168] Holy Qur'an 11:118, 10:19

application in human life. The moral agent, as a result of his functional *Fitrah* outlook, sees himself as a member of the same human family.

The second *Fitrah* outlook foundation is the strong rejection of exclusiveness and election.[169] The moral agent recognizes that no community may lay claim to be uniquely guided and elected.[170] His Qur'an teaches him that his community is a community among other communities that must compete with each other in goodness[171] despite its leadership role.[172] The Qur'an teaches that the unique position of such leadership requires upholding good and forbidding evil, i.e. living the moral outlook [173]

Having established these foundations of the *Fitrah* implication with respect to other world traditions, we are ready to find the common ground among these traditions. Seyyed Hossein Nasr summarizes the similarities that bind Christians and Muslims together in his Papal address on "A Common Word"[174] as follows:

> Acceptance of sacred scripture, belief in the reality, and preeminence of the spirit within, and in spiritual world beyond our subject: raising the immortality of the soul, the efficacy of prayer and other religious rights, the necessity of the ethical character of human life here on earth and its consequences for life after death, ultimate judgment by God and eschatological realities, the reality of good and evil interplay of the mercy and justice of God, and the reflection of the wisdom of God in His creation.[175]

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[169] Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, 165.

[170] Holy Qur'an 2:62, 5:69

[171] "Every person has his direction to which he turns, so vie with one another in good works. Wherever you may be, God will bring you all together; surely God has power over all things". Holy Qur'an 2:148

[172] "You are the best community brought forth to men, enjoining decency, and forbidding indecency, and believing in God." Holy Qur'an 3:110

[173] "And if you turn away, He will replace you with another people, and they will not be the likes of you." Holy Qur'an 47:38

[174] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "The Word of God, The Bridge between Him, you and us," Sophiha: The Journey of Traditional Studies (2009): 68.

[175] Ibid.

These similarities between Christians and Muslims can be expanded to include many other world traditions. Many traditions associate human dignity with an immortal soul or self. Many insist upon morality and the ethical nature of human actions with consequences beyond the grave. Many affirm the reality of good and evil and their basic distinction. In fact, ethical norms (‘*urf*) are similar in so many ways among the majority of world traditions. After a quick look at their moral landscape, one finds *Fitrah* outlook in action, avoidance of the “seven deadly sins”, the importance of family, and the presence of sexual ethics, to mention just a few.[176]

In this context, each tradition places great importance on morality with a capital ‘M’. In fact, the Prophet of Islam insisted on declaring morality and its perfection as one of chief purposes of his mission. It is narrated in the “Book of Character” of *Sahih Bukhari* that the Prophet said: “I have been sent only for the purpose of perfecting good morals”. In short, the foremost purpose of his vocation and the method of his call are to strengthen moral character. Hence, the world of beauty and perfection may be illuminated before people’s eyes, and they may try to achieve morality consciously and with complete conviction.

One can say that all rituals across the world’s traditions are designed to enhance and strengthen our moral being, i.e. our *Fitrah*. They are not useless acts or meaningless movements of the body. All the rituals are “moral training exercises” to empower the moral agent to enhance and strengthen his morals and values so that he can live righteously, i.e. *Salih* and adhere to such virtues until the end of his moral journey, regardless of the moral typhoon which he finds himself in. Indeed, whether it is the ritual

[176] Ibid.

of fasting or the pilgrimage, both are designed to give the agent an "inner experience".[177] All are acts that reaffirm of how precious the gift of faith is. Therefore, where faith is mounted with action, it will definitely yield an excellent moral life, a life of inner illumination as a result of the reality of sanctity, leading and pointing to God.[178]

Furthermore, regardless of the tradition one can see how certain sacraments are means of purification.[179] For instance, according to the Islamic tradition the five daily prayers ought to prohibit evil.[180] Islamic charity (*zakat*) is designed to sow the seeds of kindness, sympathy, and benevolence in the heart of adherents. [181] It can help establish a relationship of love and friendship among community members. In short, no matter what tradition one looks at, one can see the rituals as "stepping stones" to righteousness and a mechanism to strengthen morality and build character.

Therefore, despite the differences in their spirit and appearance, religious rites share the same essence and purpose, i.e. to help the agent be good (*Salih*) and do good (*Muslih*) on the individual, familial, and communal levels. It provides the power to bind the moral agents with each other, since it encourages and demands the good of others, not just the good for oneself. All this is made possible by a proper utilization of the *Fitrah* outlook which helps the moral agent live morally, consistent with "A Common Word".

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[177] Ibid.

[178] Ibid.

[179] "Take of their wealth some alms, to purify them and to cleanse them thereby." Holy Qur'an 9:103

[180] "Recite what has been revealed to you of the Book, and maintain prayer; truly prayer prohibits lewd acts and indecency. And the remembrance of God is surely greater, and God knows what you do." Holy Qur'an 29:45

[181] This Qur'anic concept can be expanded to include many honorable virtuous acts i.e. to smile to someone, to command good and forbid evil, to guide a lost person by giving directions and to remove harm from the road.

One might ask what about those who do not have a tradition of faith? What is the relationship between the moral agent and such individuals in the world of ethics? It was argued in chapter two that if one mistakenly identifies oneself as an accidental being rather than a being created for a higher purpose, the search for moral motivation fails to lead to equilibrium and balance in the moral agent, i.e. the debate between accounts of man as *homo sapiens* vs. *homo vaitor*. It was shown that for the moral agent as *homo viator*, everything is normatively relevant. He listens to what the universe has to say about the Creator, as creation draws his attention to certain obvious facts. Then the agent recognizes these facts as reminders of God.[182] Once this all-encompassing, Infinite is found, God becomes the dimension which makes all other dimensions possible, especially the moral dimension, because He gives meaning and life to everything. Thus, God is the very meaning of reality, a meaning manifested, clarified, and brought home by the universe which the moral agent reads as "God's sign" pointing to the One with infinite majesty and His equally infinite mercy.[183] As a result, all the agent's relationships are based on this fact. Every one deserves love and respect. "To love God and to love the neighbor" are the trademarks of the moral agent, and everyone is his neighbor. *Fitrah* outlook involves a consideration of other persons as persons and not just as things, and provides a framework for achieving a certain goal, purpose, function or end.[184]

Additionally, the moral agent's world becomes a "first world" and not a "second" or "third world" when the *Fitrah* outlook is applied, because of the characteristic moral

[182] Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, 2.

[183] Ibid.

[184] Holy Qur'an 38:17, 21:16-17, 23:115, 75:36

comprehension it entails. One could argue that such an outlook enlightens the intellect, perfects the self, and cleanses the body. Its moral order refuses any immoral chaos and its moral dynamic fights all forms of moral laziness and brings moral life to every human encounter.[185]

It is based on love and highlighted by the following guideposts. First of all, the story of the debate between truth and falsehood is as old as the story of man.[186] One might argue that humanity has inherited this debate in the same manner as language or color. Secondly, for any debate to be fruitful, its currency has to be freedom, i.e. freedom of thought, freedom of choice, and freedom of action. Otherwise, such currency would be counterfeit and distorted, and the results are a truncated picture of morality. All that is needed is to set the stage for everyone to choose freely without any force or compulsion. Thirdly, everyone should be humble regardless of one's strength, wealth or knowledge, since no one knows if or when one will fall into the trap of fate.[187] As Socrates said to Plato: "And what kind of a man am I? One of those would gladly refute another who says what is not true, but would be no less happy to be refuted myself than to refute."[188]

Lastly, when all else fails after proper clarification and explanation, the following Islamic declaration will be professed: "To you, your way, and to me, mine".[189] "Our Lord

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[185] "Why, is he who was dead, and We gave him life, and appointed for him a light by which to walk among people, as him whose likeness is in darkness whence he cannot emerge? So, what the disbelievers have been doing has been adorned for them." Holy Qur'an 6:122

[186] "We have sent you with the truth, a bearer of good tidings, and warner. You shall not be asked about the inhabitants of Hell-fire." Holy Qur'an 2:119

[187] Holy Qur'an 74:8-11

[188] Socrates, Plato, Gorgias 4589.

[189] "You have your religion and I have my religion." Holy Qur'an 109:6

and yours is the Lord of the worlds, the Creator of all". Soon, everyone shall see the result of his *Fitrah* outlook. This is nicely illustrated by Harry S. Truman in his autobiography:

> My mother was always a woman who did the right thing, and she taught us… that, too. We were taught that punishment always followed transgression, and where she was concerned it always did… in those days… people thought more of an honest man than any one thing, and, if man wasn't honest, he wouldn't stay long in the neighborhood. They would run him out.[190]

The *Qur'an* teaches the moral agent four pillars on which the core of his relationship with those who deny Ultimate Reality is built. The first pillar is the clear manifestation and conveyance of the *Fitrah* outlook. This is done by presenting the principles lucidly and answering all objections respectfully with ample time for reflection and pondering.[191] The moral agent's sole role is to convey, advice, counsel and clarify.[192] He knows that morality cannot be established by force or coercion,[193] nor can it rely on violence for its implementation. The master key is the absolute decision to "care or not to care" about morality, and the consequence of the choice is not for others to bear.[194]

The *Qur'an* teaches the second pillar in 2:256, which is emphasized throughout the divine book.[195] The moral agent does not let power or arrogance intoxicate his mind or blur his moral vision. The light of the freedom to choose is the pivotal force in his moral

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[190] Quoted in Merle Miller, *Plain Speaking: An Oral Biography of Harry. S. Truman* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1973), 46-48.

[191] Holy Qur'an 3:20, 5:99, 16:35, 16: 82, 24:54

[192] "Your Lord knows you best. If He will, He will have mercy on you, or if He will, He will chastise you. And We did not send you to be a guardian over them." Holy Qur'an 17:54, see Abdullah Al., 835.

[193] Holy Qur'an 29:18, 42:48

[194] "We have sent you with the truth, a bearer of good tidings, and Warner. You shall not be asked about the inhabitants of Hell-fire." Holy Qur'an 2: 119

[195] Holy Qur'an 10:99, 18:29, 6:135, 6:158, 39:41, 27:91-92

discourse. There is no discomfort, anger, or threat. Moreover, when there is rejection, the *moral* agent does not let his patience end, since it is an everlasting virtue that he cannot be without.

The third pillar that the Qur'an teaches is patience and self-control when one is intimidated or frustrated.[196] It is perseverance when faced with ignorance, forgiveness and pardon when one is threatened and accused.

Lastly, when everything else fails, i.e. the clarified explanation, freedom of choice, and patience, then the Qur'an asks the moral agent to avoid confrontation and withdraw himself without harming anyone or anything.[197] He is to convey his moral *Fitrah* outlook clearly and patiently without any coercion and to walk away when there is rejection, objection and resentment. This is the fourth pillar for building the relationship.

One last point worth mentioning before ending this chapter is the role of the *Fitrah* outlook in Civilizational dialogue. Indeed, the Fitrah outlook can play a central role in this field. The first and foremost role is the traditional understanding the *Fitrah* outlook gives to the very concept of civilization. Seyyed Hossein Nasr asserts that the very foundation of such dialogue is the return to the traditional understanding of civilization because "[it] enjoyed a remarkable universality among various traditional human collectivities".[198] Such universality, Nasr continues, was a result of the dominant idea that:

> All the realities that compromise the life of a tradition are contained in the particular 'City of God' whose manifestation on earth has created the particular civilization in question.

[196] Holy Qur'an 16:126-127, 28:55, 30:60, 40:55, 40:77, 41:34, 46:35, 50:39, 52:48

[197] Holy Qur'an 51:53-54, 52:45, 54:6

[198] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Civilizational Dialogue in the Islamic World", Journal of Inter-Cultural Perspectives: 1.

> Moreover, each human being contains this 'City' within himself or herself and is able to realize it if he or she is able to perfect himself or herself spiritually.[199]

The *Fitrah* outlook provides an awareness of this transcendent and immanent reality. The moral agent is living in a space which is like the space of a circle with an immutable Supreme Center, and is always experiencing time in relation to the Origin, which is also his End, i.e. the *alpha* and *omega* of his existence.[200] "Say: Lo! My worship and my sacrifice and my living and my dying are for Allah, Lord of the Worlds." (6:162).

This is contrary to desire-ethics and duty-ethics, for they both have substituted the kingdom of man for the kingdom of God. As we have seen throughout this thesis, they are both based on the absolutization of terrestrial man, humanism, and rationalism.[201]

The *Fitrah* outlook can carry out this Civilizational dialogue mission for two main reasons. First of all, the *Fitrah* outlook sees "an inner truth that unites the religions on the supra-formal and universal level without in any way violating the sanctity of their particular structures".[202] Secondly, the *Fitrah* outlook is understood and implemented by millions of Muslims across the Islamic world throughout the centuries. It was done before and can be done once again within the Islamic world which stretched from the very first century of its existence from

[199] Ibid.

[200] Ibid.

[201] Ibid.

[202] Ibid.

the sub-Saharan Africa to the borders of China. It occupies the middle belt of the world. Nasr emphasizes that:

> In contrast to the West, where experience of other civilizations, except for the Islamic, was combined with the advent of modernism, Islam had full awareness of many other civilizations and also religions before modern times. For a thousand years it saw itself as both the central and the most powerful of all civilizations.[203]

Therefore, the Islamic *Fitrah* outlook offers a unique platform which binds all world traditions together on the basis of mutual respect and mutual understanding. It has a crucial role to play given its geography as well as its historical experience, and can carry out Civilizational dialogue with all other civilizations. There are no more clashes, only dialogue.

[203] Ibid.

Chapter VI: Conclusion

Living in this contemporary period, one cannot thrust one's fingers into one's ears, cover oneself up with one's garments, and pretend that there is no moral crisis. The voices of alarm are coming from everywhere, warning humanity of a catastrophic end under current conventional moral theories. Given the multiplying anomalies in our present time across cultures, the need for a moral paradigm shift, or another outlook, is growing in urgency. Everyone is afflicted by the pervasive state of moral disarray, and the calls for a moral savior are louder and louder. Having deep concern for moral justice, I have explored alternatives to secular moral claims regarding a true moral life, which I have argued contain a contradiction between the professed end and the means employed.

I have tried in the preceding chapters to introduce the *Fitrah* outlook as a solution, and I hope that I have made a small contribution in this regard. I have presented two major moral outlooks in this thesis: 1) the secular represented by three major schools of thought, namely deontological or "duty-ethics", consequential or "desire-ethics", and the social contract theory, and 2) religious virtue ethics from an Islamic perspective represented by the *Fitrah* outlook, with *Fitrah* as its nodal nexus. The latter looks at moral motivation as the essence of human nature, whereas the former upholds one dimension of human nature at a time, i.e. intellectual, sensual, or social. As we have seen, this compartmental approach does not give the moral agent enough "ground" and leaves him "hanging" without sufficient foundation to anchor his moral agency. The *Fitrah* outlook, however, celebrates the existence of an innate disposition, or inherent capacity

that enables the agent to exercise his moral judgment. This *Fitrah* outlook offers a balance between the nature of goodness (*khayr*) and righteousness, or the unity between the "right" and the "good" as two sides of the same coin. Unfortunately, they have been erroneously separated by Kantian deontological ethics and utilitarianism, as well as divine command theory.

In this thesis, I have tried to maintain a balance between creativity and respect for the continuity of the Islamic tradition. I have tried to present a moral vision that encompasses the religious, scriptural, theological, and philosophical Qur'anic ethos. The reassertion of the moral vision associated with *shari'ah*-based reasoning was my goal, for the notion of morality and the integration of all of life around a Sacred Center is a foundational narrative of my faith. But much more work remains to be done in order to bring to life the *Fitrah* outlook with *Fitrah* epitome as its nodal nexus.

In the meantime, the new wind of hope which this thesis presents can help the moral agent feel the warm sun's rays penetrate the stormy moral gloom around him. Man writes his moral destiny in the context of struggle to reach his moral maturity. And the *Fitrah* torch can spark and guide his ways as he comes of moral age. He realizes that he is no longer living in a traditional world impregnated by faith and is confronted by a materialistic worldview that negates God and opposes his *Fitrah* outlook. Nonetheless, in the heat of this battle, he continues to anchor himself to the shade of the banner of the two supreme commandments. It is to love God and to love the neighbor, the whole of humanity.

If Islamic doctrine is right regarding this "upright nature" shaped by a Creator in which He created humanity, then those who currently espouse duty and desired-based

ethics, but who are open to other perspectives will have no problem taking the “leap”. However, for many moralists, making such a move will be a real challenge. Nevertheless, from a religious point of view, making sense of moral motivation depends on the triumph of *Fitrah* in the field of ethics and the ability to fully appreciate the miracle of being human.

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